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Food Not Bombs

Food Not Bombs (FNB) is a loose-knit group of independent collectives, sharing free, usually vegan and vegetarian food with others. The group believes that corporate and government priorities are skewed to allow hunger to persist in the midst of abundance. To demonstrate this, FNB serves surplus food gathered from grocery stores, bakeries and markets which would otherwise go to waste, or occasionally has already been thrown away. The group exhibits a form of franchise activism.

Food Not Bombs

Food Not Bombs logo

Type	Network of collectives
Website	www.foodnotbombs.net (http://www.foodnotbombs.net/)

Background and principles

Food Not Bombs is an all-volunteer global movement sharing free, usually[1][2] vegan meals as a protest against war and poverty. Each chapter collects surplus food from grocery stores, bakeries, and that would otherwise go to waste and occasionally collects items from garbage dumpsters when stores are uncooperative.[3] FNB also accepts donations from local farmers, then prepares free community meals which are offered to anyone who is hungry.

The group serves free meals

Meals are usually vegan or vegetarian, as stated in the groups principles.[4] However, the Gainesville, Florida, US chapter, for example, serves meals that include animal products such as chicken, pork chops, brisket, steak and shrimp.[1][2]

According to FNB, the group's central beliefs are:[4]

- Meals are free to anyone.
- Each chapter is independent and autonomous and makes decisions via consensus.
- Dedication to nonviolence.
- Views "food as a right not a privilege."[5]

Coinciding with these beliefs, the groups' goals are:

1. To combat poverty and homelessness[6]
2. To facilitate community gatherings of hungry people
3. To allow anyone to volunteer to help cook, and then eat.[7]

Activity

1980s

Food Not Bombs was founded in 1980 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, by anti-nuclear activists Keith McHenry,[8] Jo Swanson, Mira Brown, Susan Eaton, Brian Feigenbaum, C.T. Lawrence Butler,[9] Jessie Constable and Amy Rothstien. According to Keith McHenry, the name came about when he discovered that they were distributing food to the poor just across the street from a new building development for Draper Labs where, rumor had it, they were designing nuclear weapons.[10] McHenry says that it made the group realize that "there are hungry people on one side of the street. There are people on the other that are making money making nuclear weapons. We should be called 'Food Not Bombs.' "[10] Co-founder, Keith McHenry has volunteered for 35 years and can be found sharing food almost every week in various cities including Santa Cruz, California, and Taos, New Mexico. The members' activities included providing food, marching, and protesting. They protested such things as nuclear power, United States' involvement in the Salvadoran Civil War, and discrimination against the homeless.[11]

The first arrests for sharing free food (aka 'sharing') occurred on August 15, 1988 at the entrance to Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, California. Nine people were arrested that day, including McHenry. The city made over 1,000 arrests, and Amnesty International declared these volunteers 'prisoners of conscience'.[12]

"Free Soup for the Revolution" illustration

2000s

In the summer of 2007, the Fort Lauderdale, Florida FNB chapter began receiving systematic harassment from local law enforcement culminating in an ultimatum presented by the Fort Lauderdale police. The police demanded the arrest of volunteers responsible for the public 'sharings'. The following week, hundreds of supporters for FNB managed to compel local law enforcement to relent, which lasted until the 2010s.[13]

The city of Orlando, Florida enacted an ordinance prohibiting the serving of food to more than a specified number[*how many?*] of people without a permit.[14] In the fall of 2007, Eric Montanez of Orlando's FNB was charged with violating Orlando's city ordinance. On October 10, 2007, Montanez was acquitted by a jury of the charge.[15][16] FNB along with a church for the homeless (*First Vagabonds Church of God*) sued the city[14] on the grounds that their food service is covered under the first amendment as a part of *protected political speech and religious activity*. The groups won the lawsuit and the city ordinance was overturned. The city of Orlando appealed to the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals and subsequently won.[14] On August 31, 2010, the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals threw out the decision, barring Orlando from enforcing the ordinance until another hearing before a 10-judge panel could take place.[14]

In May 2008, local business owners attempted to stop the Kitchener, Ontario, FNB group from serving meals in a highly-visible downtown location,[17] describing the group as "supporting meat-free diets, anti-capitalism, and an end to Canada's military intervention in Afghanistan."[18]

"Food Not Bombs" mural in Berlin, Germany, protests the military industrial complex and food insecurity.

In April 2009, the city of Middletown, Connecticut, issued a cease-and-desist order to the local chapter of FNB. Prior to the order, the city health inspector cited the organization for distributing food without a license. In August 2009, the chapter began operating through a licensed kitchen provided by the Middletown First Church of Christ Congregational as state hearings into the matter were held.[19]

The most widely publicized restrictions on food sharing involving FNB were the 2011 feeding bans in Florida. Similar laws have been enacted in other jurisdictions, including Philadelphia[20] and Houston.[21]

A Food Not Bombs chapter serves a meal in a public park.

2010s

On April 12, 2011, an en banc panel of the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the Orlando ordinance as a valid "time, place and manner" regulation,[22] reversing the initial ruling of *First Vagabonds Church of God, An Unincorporated Association, Brian Nichols v. City of Orlando, Florida* and removing the permanent injunction against the Orlando ordinance that was first attempted in 2007.[23] The lawyer for Orlando FNB issued a cease and desist order to the city,[24] saying that violating the ordinance was not an arrestable offense, and hackers claiming to be affiliated with Anonymous began issuing threats to the city of Orlando. Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer received heavy criticism for referring to Food Not Bombs activists as "food terrorists."[25][26][27]

On June 20, Ben Markeson was cited for holding a sign without a permit, and hackers carried through with their threats and took down the Orlando Chamber of Commerce site and a Universal Studios website in "Operation Orlando".[28][29] On June 22, more arrests took place including a second arrest of McHenry. On July 1, after national and international attention and further hacks, OFNB accepted the Mayor's suggestion to move sharings to City Hall, which stopped arrests and resulted in a new, stable arrangement for Orlando's FNB.[30][31]

A homeless hacktivist named Christopher Doyon, also known as "Commander X", was eventually arrested for "Operation Orlando" and other activity. Soon after his arraignment he held a press statement where he admitted to all charges, but argued that the distributed denial of service attacks constituted acts of cyber-civil disobedience.[32][33] On August 19, 2011, Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer held a press conference to announce that charges against food sharers arrested in Lake Eola Park, Orlando, were dropped, resulting in a new state of compromise between Buddy Dyer's administration and Orlando Food Not Bombs.[34]

An ordinance in Sarasota, Florida, in 2011 required a special event permit for gatherings of 75 or more people. Local condominium residents petitioned to require permits for even smaller groups of 12, as well as a permit for vending in public. Numerous other ordinances targeted the homeless, including the banning of smoking and removing park benches.[35][36] At the time, homeless shelters in Gainesville, Florida could feed only 130 people at a time, leading to the formation of the Coalition To End The Meal Limit,[37] who successfully lifted the meal limit and other rules in 2011.[38]

Food Not Bombs groups were heavily involved in supporting occupation camps across the US during the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement.[39] A FNB kitchen was removed in a late-night police confrontation with Occupy San Francisco in mid-October.[40] C.T. Lawrence Butler joined Occupy Boston.[41] Keith McHenry participated in many camps[42] and released a new FNB handbook.[43]

Universal food bank participants with Food Not Bombs banner in October 2011

A Food Not Bombs World Gathering took place August 20–26, 2012, in Tampa, Florida – the week before the Republican National Convention.[44] In conjunction with Occupy Tampa and many other organizations, FNB activists collected and prepared food for hundreds of RNC protesters and offered workshops, cultural events, and protest activities from August 20–30.[45]

Near the end of 2012, FNB activists, in particular, Long Island FNB, fed thousands of people in the wake of Superstorm Sandy alongside "Occupy Sandy."[46] The outpouring of food going to waste and support for disaster-stricken, impoverished communities culminated in the "Largest Food Not Bombs Ever" at the "Hempstead Food Share Bonanza" on Nov. 18th.[47]

In November 2014, the city of Fort Lauderdale enacted a sharing ban.[48] Several Food Not Bombs activists were arrested sharing food and other acts of civil disobedience, for which they received "Civil Liberties Arrest" medals from the Broward County ACLU.[49][50][51] Other FNB activists went on hunger strike against enforcement of the law.[52] A court injunction stopped enforcement of the sharing ban in early December 2014 pending several court cases. On August 22, 2018, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit ruled that outdoor food sharing by Food Not Bombs was protected under the First Amendment.[53]

2020s

A Food Not Bombs chapter in Houston had been issued 96 tickets since March of 2023. One case was dismissed for FNBHTX volunteer Aliene Adams and 7 cases were dismissed against FNBHTX volunteer Shere Dore, who carries 18 of the 96 citations. The following week, the city attorney refiled those dismissed cases against Adams and Dore. Food Not Bombs Houston received nationwide attention, including an article in the New York Times. As volunteers continued to receive citations, in January 2024 the group joined Texas Civil Rights Project and sued the City of Houston. In February 2024, Federal Judge Hanen ordered an injunction against the city ceasing further citations. In June 2024, the city of Houston filed a motion to dismiss the lawsuit and the motion was denied by Judge Hanen. The group now serves an upwards of 200 or more individuals. The group is expected to go to federal trial in October 2025. The group continues to serve hundreds of people 4 nights a week. [54]

The tickets were issued under a city ordinance enacted in 2012, which states that those wanting to distribute free meals to more than five people must first obtain operating permission from the property owner(s).[55] In August, eight of the tickets were dismissed after representees from the Houston Police Department fail to show up.[54] Mayor John Whitmire's office stated, "members of his administration look forward to meeting and working with interested parties regarding the Charitable Food Ordinance."[54]

Three Food Not Bombs volunteers were charged in West Palm Beach, Florida, under a similar ordinance against sharing food with groups of people in September 2023.[56]

Globalization

Since inception the organization has become a global organization[57] in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. With over 500 chapters there are some not listed meaning there can be over 1000 chapters in 60 countries. There are 32 known Food Not Bombs groups in Canada, as well as groups in London, England, Prague, Czechia, Melbourne, Australia, and Kyiv, Ukraine. Offshoots of the organization were present in the West Bank in Palestine, Bosnia and Herzegovina Square in Sarajevo, and Minsk. The organization works with Earth First!, The Leonard Peltier Defense Committee, Anarchist Black Cross, the IWW, Homes Not Jails, Anti Racist Action, Farm Animal Rights Movement, In Defense of Animals, the Free Radio Movement, and other organizations.[58]

See also

- Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Act of 1996
- Curry Without Worry
- DIY ethic
- Dumpster diving
- Freeganism
- Give-away shop
- Homeless ministry
- Langar, a centuries-old tradition where vegetarian meals are supplied free of charge to the hungry at Sikh temples worldwide.
- Langar (Sufism), an Islamic tradition where free food is provided.
- One World Cafe
- Rumford's Soup
- SAME Cafe
- Volxkuche, a type of food kitchen with a secular / alternative culture character.

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External links

- Official website (https://www.foodnotbombs.net/)
- FNB contacts around the world https://foodnotbombs.net/new_site/map/ITALY.html

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